**Is there any evidence to prove the existence of the prophet, Balaam?**

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| http://www.christiananswers.net/0.gif | http://www.christiananswers.net/0.gif | [Eden Communications](http://www.christiananswers.net/eden/home.html)  In an unprecedented discovery, an ancient text found at Deir Alla, Jordan, in 1967 tells about the activities of a [prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html) named [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html). Could this be the Balaam of the Old Testament?  The text makes it clear that it is. Three times in the first four lines he is referred to as “[Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) son of [Beor](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/beor.html),” exactly as in the [Bible](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/home.html). This represents the first Old Testament [prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html) to be dug up in Bible lands—not his [tomb](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/tombs.html) or his skeleton, but a text about him. The text also represents the first [prophecy](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophecy.html) of any scope from the ancient West Semitic world to be found outside the Old Testament, and the first extra-Biblical example of a prophet proclaiming doom to his own people.  Eden Communications  Balaam with Balak’s messengers  Balaam was not an [Israelite](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/israel.html). He was hired by [Balak](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balak.html), [king](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/king.html) of [Moab](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moab.html), to [curse](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/curse.html) the Israelites. They were camped on the east side of the [Jordan](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jordan.html) river, about to make their historic entry into the promised land. Through God's intervention, Balaam was obliged to [bless](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bless.html) the Israelites rather than [curse](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/curse.html) them ([Num 22-24](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html)).  Afterwards, Balaam seems to have been the cause of the Israelites' [sin](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/sin.html) in [Numbers 25](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num25.html) when they took [Moabite](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moabite.html) and [Midianite](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/midianite.html) [women](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/women.html) and worshipped the [Moabite](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moab.html) god [Baal-peor](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/baal-peor.html) ([Num 31:16](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num31.html#16)).  [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) was eventually killed when [Moses](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moses.html) sent the Israelites against the [Midianites](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/midianite.html) ([Num 31](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num31.html)). He is further condemned in [Scripture](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/scripture.html) in [2 Peter 2:15](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/2pet2.html#15) (he loved the wages of unrighteousness), [Jude 11](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/jude1.html#11) (ungodly men ran greedily after the error of [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) for reward) and [Revelation 2:14](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/rev2.html#14) (he taught [Balak](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balak.html) to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to [eat](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/food.html) things [sacrificed](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/sacrifice.html) to [idols](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/idol.html), and to commit [fornication](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/fornication.html)).  The remarkable text found at Deir Alla consists of 119 fragments of plaster inscribed with black and red [ink](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/inkhorn.html). It was among the rubble of a building destroyed in an [earthquake](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/earthquake.html). It seems to have been one long column with at least 50 lines, displayed on a plastered wall. According to the excavators' dating, the disaster was most likely the severe earthquake which occurred in the time of [King](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/king.html) [Uzziah](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/uzziah.html) ([Azariah](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/azariah.html)) and the [prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html) [Amos](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/amos.html) in about 760 BC ([Amos 1:1](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/amos1.html#1); [Zec 14:5](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/zec14.html#5)). The lower part of the text shows signs of wear, indicating that it had been on the wall for some time prior to the earthquake.  Written in Aramaic, the text begins with the title "Warnings from the Book of [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) the son of [Beor](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/beor.html). He was a [seer](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/seer.html) of the gods." It is in red ink, as are other portions of the text where emphasis is desired. The reference to the "Book of [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html)" indicates that the text was part of a pre-existing document and therefore the original date of the material is much earlier than the plaster text itself. Balaam goes on to relate a [vision](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/vision.html) concerning impending judgment from the gods, and enters into a dispute with his listeners.  There are a number of similarities between the text and the account of [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) in the [book of](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/numbersbookof.html) [Numbers](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num1.html). To begin with, the events described in [Numbers 22-24](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html) took place in the same general area where the text was found. At the time of the [Numbers 22-24](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html) incident, the Israelites were camped on the Plains of [Moab](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moab.html), across the [Jordan](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jordan.html) river from [Jericho](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jericho.html). Deir Alla is located about 25 miles north of this area, where the [Jabbok](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jabbok.html) river flows into the Jordan valley. Balaam was from [Pethor](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/pethor.html), near "the [river](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/river.html)" ([Num 22:5](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html#5)), in "[Aram](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/aram.html)" ([Num 23:7](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num23.html#7); [Dt 23:4](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/deu23.html#4)).  The reference to [Aram](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/aram.html) has led most scholars to conclude that Balaam was from northern [Syria](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/syria.html), in the vicinity of the [Euphrates](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/euphrates.html) river. That does not fit well with the Biblical account, however, since Balaam's home seems to have been close to where the Israelites were camped (Num [22:1-22](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html#1); [31:7-8](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num31.html#7)).  In view of [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) being revered at Deir Alla, one would expect that Deir Alla was his home. This is exactly what William Shea has proposed, based on his reading of the name [Pethor](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/pethor.html) in an inscribed [clay](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/clay.html) [tablet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/tablet.html) found at Deir Alla (1989:108-11). In this case, the [river](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/river.html) of [Numbers 22:5](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html#5) would be the Jabbok river and the *naharaim* (two rivers) of [Deuteronomy 23:4](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/deu23.html#4) would be the [Jabbok](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jabbok.html) and [Jordan](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jordan.html) rivers.  With regard to the references to [Aram](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/aram.html), Shea suggests that the original place name was [Adam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/adam.html), with the “d” being miscopied as “r,” since the two letters are nearly identical in ancient [Hebrew](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/hebrewlanguage.html). [Adam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/adam.html) was a town about eight miles southwest of Deir Alla, on the east bank of the [Jordan river](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jordan.html), where the Jabbok meets the Jordan.  [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) evidently was well known as a "[cursing](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/curse.html) [prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html)," for Balak specifically summoned Balaam for the purpose of cursing Israel ([Num 22:6](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html#6)). Much of the Deir Alla text was given to curses uttered by the prophet. The term “shadday-gods” is used on two occasions in the text. [*Shadday*](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/shaddai.html) is one of the [names for God](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/namesofgod.html) in the Old Testament, used mainly in the [book of](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jobbookof.html) [Job](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/job1.html). Since the account of [Job](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/job.html) is set in Transjordan ([Job 1:1-3](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/job1.html#1)), it seems that Shadday was a name used for deity in this region. [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) used the name twice in his [blessing](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/bless.html) speeches where it is translated “Almighty” (Num [24:4](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num24.html#4), [16](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num24.html#16)).  The Deir Alla text presents a problem to those who dismiss the Biblical account of the [Exodus](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/exo1.html), [Wilderness](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/wilderness.html) Wanderings and Conquest as legendary, as is the trend in scholarship today. It is clear that Balaam was a real person who operated on the east side of the [Jordan](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/jordan.html) river. He was known as a [cursing](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/curse.html) [prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html) and continued to be revered hundreds of years after his death. His persona as revealed in the Deir Alla text precisely matches that of the [Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) of [Numbers 22-24](http://www.christiananswers.net/bible/num22.html). If Balaam was a real person, what about [Balak](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balak.html), [Moses](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/moses.html), [Joshua](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/joshua.html) and all of the other persons named in the Biblical narrative? They must have been real as well, and the events described authentic.  **Recommended for further reading**   1. Dijkstra, M. "Is Balaam Also Among the Prophets?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*. 1995. 114: 43-64. 2. Shea, W.H. "The Inscribed Tablets From Tell Deir `Alla". Andrews University Seminary Studies. 1989. 27: 21-37; 97-119. 3. Wood, B.G. "Prophecy of Balaam Found in Jordan". *Bible and Spade*. 1977. 6: 121-24.   **Related issues**   * [About Balaam](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/balaam.html) * [Prophecy](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophecy.html) * [Prophet](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html) * [Miracle](http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/miracle.html) * [Archaeology and the Bible](http://www.christiananswers.net/archaeology/home.html)   Author: Bryant G. Wood of [Associates for Biblical Research](http://www.biblearchaeology.org/)  [Copyright ©](http://www.christiananswers.net/copyrite.html) 1995, Associates for Biblical Research, All Rights Reserved - except as noted on attached [“Usage and Copyright”](http://www.christiananswers.net/copyrite.html) page that grants ChristianAnswers.Net users generous rights for putting this page to work in their homes, personal witnessing, churches and schools. |